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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 000388

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SUBJECT: PM GIZENGA OUTLINES CHALLENGES OF NEW GOVERNMENT

REF: KIGALI 324

Classified By: PolCouns DBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d

¶1. (C) Summary. Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga acknowledges that the DRC confronts great challenges, and wants to send a strong signal that things have changed. He is especially concerned about widespread corruption and impunity, and the lack of a culture of work. He looks forward to a productive partnership with the United States. He believes it is time to move beyond the conflicts of the past, and look to the future. Actions by his government have so far failed to meet the high expectations he has set for it. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Prime Minister Antoine Gizenga, a committed socialist as a young man, repeatedly emphasized the concept of "work" in several contexts March 20 during the first official call by the Ambassador since Gizenga assumed the prime ministership. The meeting took place two days prior to the outbreak of violence in Kinshasa between government forces and the militia of Senator and former Vice President Jean-Pierre Bemba. Minister Godefroid Mayobo and PolCouns sat in.

¶3. (C) Gizenga was frank about the scale of the task he and his government face. He noted that both great challenges and great needs confront the country. "The Congo doesn't produce much, but it has a large appetite," he commented. He especially highlighted the fight against theft, corruption and impunity. "We are very determined that things will not be like they were before." He emphasized the need to send a strong signal that things have changed, and noted the importance of investors receiving this message. He stressed the need for a moral renewal in the country.

¶4. (C) Gizenga expressed hope for partnership with the United States. "What do we need from the United States?" he asked. "We want to work together." He said he preferred not to discuss specifics at his first official meeting as Prime Minister with the Ambassador, but looked forward to doing so subsequently. He noted however his strong desire to reduce the vast disparity between living standards in Congo's countryside and cities. He particularly emphasized rekindling the spirit of work among the Congolese people. "It's been lost here," he said.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador noted that the U.S. is impressed by the emphasis Gizenga is giving to good governance and eliminating corruption. He stressed that the Congolese people need to have a sense of hope for the future. He agreed that the challenges are great, and stressed setting priorities, citing in particular security sector reform, the budget, infrastructure and services, the future of MONUC, and the government's relations with the IFIs.

15. (C) The Ambassador asked if Gizenga would consider holding a series of exchanges with the diplomatic community. Gizenga responded positively, and stressed the importance of contacts and dialogue in moving the Congo forward. "It's work we'll do together," he said, and cited his admiration for the United States for having achieved progress through hard work. The Ambassador pressed regarding what might be welcomed by Gizenga and the government in terms of a more structured forum for interaction with the international community, for example a regular series of meetings with a defined group of representatives. Gizenga in essence declined the invitation to go into specifics, affirming again that close contacts were welcome, but saying that these issues were being examined and that no policy position had yet been established.

16. (C) The Ambassador noted strong interest in Congo following elections from both the executive and legislative branches in Washington. Gizenga reiterated that the basic issue for him was not aid, but putting people productively to work.

17. (C) The Ambassador pledged that the United States would continue its engagement on the regional level as well to achieve stability, citing the recent Tripartite-Plus meeting in Kigali (reftel). He expressed hope that Congo would resume diplomatic relations with all its neighbors. Gizenga agreed, saying "First rapprochement, then unity." He said it was important to forget the war, and look to the future.

18. (C) Comment. Gizenga's principled stands on issues such as corruption have won him support, but his effectiveness as

KINSHASA 00000388 002 OF 002

Prime Minister is still open to question. In his 80s, Gizenga apparently maintains a relatively light schedule; however, the list of urgent issues and questions awaiting government decisions is daunting. There is a widening impression that the government is bogged down trying to get on top of the mess that it has inherited. It is widely expected that Gizenga's key aide, Minister Mayobo, will pick up at least some of the slack from Gizenga's shortened schedule, but the relative authority and power of Mayobo and other ministers still seems to be evolving. For that matter, the relationships between the Prime Minister's office and the Presidency are not yet clear either. The net result is at least to-date, there have not been the kind of dramatic or bold actions that would send the strong signal of change Gizenga clearly intends. End comment.

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